IH

E/ECA/ICPP/90/6

UNITED NATIONS
Economic Commission for Africa

PROMOTING INDIGENOUS NGOS AS INSTRUMENTS OF POPULAR PARTICIPATION

by

Paul Wangoola

LG/NAIROBI.

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULAR PARTICIPATION IN THE RECOVERY AND DEVELOPMENT PROCESS IN AFRICA

12-16 February 1990
Arusha, United Republic of Tanzania

In discussing "Promoting indigenous NGOs as instruments of popular participation", it is essential to define or to articulate our understanding of strategic operative words or terms. In this case, these include "people", "popular", "indigenous NGOs" and "popular participation". And since "popular participation" has to be contextualized, we shall also say something on the purpose of popular participation: the "recovery and development process in Africa". However, rather than define these terms in a dry manner, probably at the beginning of this paper, we propose to contextually explain the strategic terms in an organic way, as we deal with them in the course of this paper.

Starting from the beginning

For several years now, a big "discovery" seems to have been made or stumbled on: "the critical importance of people's participation in the development process" if Africa is to "recover" and even more so, to "develop". By obvious implication, from the discovery "people" are not participating, at least not adequately participating.

But it should be pointed out that people have always wanted to work, to participate in the activities which are essential for their survival, as a basis for working for their thrival. People enjoy taking decisions which affect their lives now and in the future. It is only natural. And when we say "people are not participating", we should only say so in a specific sense by specifying which people and what it is that they are not participating in. This can only be so, since the very existence of people is itself proof that they are participating in a number of activities which make it possible for them to exist. For people "not to participate" in matters which affect their lives and well-being, it must be for a good reason: either they are denied the possibility to participate or it is worthless to participate, or both.

So why don't people participate in Africa's "recovery and development process"? Or don't they?

The issue of Africa's development is a historical question which must be handled so. But since we are now concerned with Africa's recovery, it is important to establish what it is that Africa must "recover" from before "development" can occur.

AFRICA: Recovery from what?

Africa's ills have been popularly explained to have started with the continent's colonization, at the turn of the last century. This is wrong. Africa's woes are much deeper and go further in history.

It all started with Africa's contact with Europe during the fifteenth century, i.e., about 500 years ago. Before the fifteenth century there was little contact between the continents of Europe, America and Africa. Most of Europe's contact with Africa was with North Africa, along the Mediterranean coast. But after the stagnation of the Middle Ages in Europe, there was an increase in production. With increased production came the increase in trade and commerce. This in turn stimulated the demand for money and commodities.

The search intensified for all sorts of commodities, especially gold and silver, which in Europe were already playing the role of money as a measure of wealth and for carrying out international trade.

Europe's search for commodities was fuelled further by the fact that Europe was and still is relatively poor in natural resources. And so began a series of voyages by adventurers, pirates, robbers and traders backed by the kings of Spain, Portugal, England and the Netherlands. These included Vasco Da Gama, Columbus, Magellan, Cook, Francis Drake, Walter Raleigh, etc.

On contact with Africa, the Portuguese discovered great wealth on the West African coast: a settled people with an integrated, endogamous, African-lead and African-driven economy based on agriculture, fishery, salt-boiling, earthenware, mining (gold and iron) and weaving. Further south along the west coast, the Bantu tribes of the Congo kingdom were skilful in working metals, including copper and iron. They wove mats and articles of clothing from raffia tissues. They domesticated several animals: pigs, sheep, chickens, and in some districts, cattle. They also had the hoe and the axe. (see Yash Tandon, 1989).

At first contact between Europe and Africa was peaceful. The most common practice in the relationship was cheating, for example, exchanging a couple of bottles of gin for a basketful of gold. But all this changed with the discovery of gold mines in Mexico and Peru. The demand for disciplined labour to work in the mines enormously grew as a result of the gold discovery. This labour could not be mobilized from within Mexico or Peru, nor could it be procured from further afield in a peaceful way.

Slave trading had been going on prior to the gold discoveries, but these discoveries introduced a qualitative change to the whole practice. Walter Rodney explained:

> When the Europeans reached the Americas they recognized its enormous potential in gold and silver and tropical produce. But that potential could not be made a reality without adequate labour supplies. The indigenous Indian population could not withstand new European diseases such as smallpox nor could they bear the organized toil of slave plantations and slave mines, having barely emerged from the hunting stage. Therefore, they turned to the nearest continent, Africa, which incidentally had a population accustomed to settled agriculture and disciplined labour in many spheres.

And so started the massive capture of Africans and their transportation to the Americas in captivity. Although the exact figures cannot be established, Africa lost an estimated 100 million able-bodied men and women through what has come to be emphatically known as "slave trade". A look at the populations of the continents of Africa, Asia and Europe tells part of the story. Although the living conditions in the three continents were not radically different, the population of African stagnated for three centuries and that of the other two continents more than doubled.

The estimated population growth in Africa, Asia and Europe between 1650 and 1900 was as follows (in millions):

YEAR	1650	1750	1850	1900
CONTINENT				
AFRICA	100	100	100	120
EUROPE	103	144	274	423
ASIA	257	437	656	857

Note: Africa's population does not start to rise until after the abolition of slavery and slave trade.

But then slave trade did not merely mean the loss of numbers. The methods which the slavers used bear this out. Take for example what one of the slaver agents of King Leopold said, as recorded by the king's biographer Edwin Ginet:

> E.S. Van Kerkhoven is coming down the Nile and will demand 1500 porters. Bringing niggers, I can hardly bear to think of them. I am asking myself how on earth I shall be able to hunt up so large a number ... Marches, hunger, exhaustion. How much blood will be shed because of this transport! Three times already I have had to take war upon the chiefs who could not help me to let the men I needed ... In a chief refuses, that means war with modern firearms on one side against assegai and javelin on the other.

> It is for this reason that Eelke Bohnet emphasises
> ... on the whole, the process by which captives were obtained in the African world was not trade at all. It was through warfare, treachery, banditry and kidnapping. When one tries to measure the effect of European slave trading on the African continent it is essential to realise that one is measuring the effect of social violence rather than trade in any normal sense of the word.

Thus slave trade seriously dented the political power and sovereignty of the African people, disrupted their economic, social cohesion and social institutions - it stagnated African development and generally put the African peoples on the continent and in the diaspora on the defensive and self-preservation line.

One way to understand the depth of injury to the African people is by looking at who was behind (and therefore benefited from) slave trade. The monarchs of Europe were directly involved. For example, the Spanish monarch who

considered West Africa to be their exclusive sphere of slave action, was alarmed when English traders started to invade this area. He instructed his ambassador in London to intervene with the English Government to persuade them to keep out of West Africa. The Spanish ambassador wrote back to his monarch:

> ... who they seek in Guinea most are slaves to take to the West Indies. I will use all effort to prevent them doing, but the greed of those people is great and they are not only merchants in these adventures but secretly many of the Queen's Council.

And when the monarch is involved where can the subjects turn for redress?!

Yet another way of clearly understanding the depth of the wound, inflicted on the African continent by slave trade is by looking at the benefits of its perpetrators. Eric Williams has brilliantly outlined as follows:

> The triangular trade gave a triple stimulus to British industry. The negroes were purchased with British manufactures, transported to the plantations, they produced sugar, cotton, indigo, molasses and other tropical products, the processing of which created jobs in England; while the maintenance of the negroes and their export to the plantations provided another outlet for British industry. Sea carrying, agriculture and Newfoundland fisheries, by 1750 there was hardly a trading or manufacturing town in England which was not in some way connected with the triangular or direct colonial trade. The profits obtained provided one of the main streams of that accumulation of capital in England which financed the industrial revolution.

Another way of understanding the benefits to the perpetrators of slave trade is by examining the possible loss to be suffered should slavery and slave trade be abolished. The arguments of Bishop Raby of France give us a clear idea of what slavery and slave trade meant to those who benefited. When the abolition of slave trade was proposed in the French National Assembly, Bishop Maury deferred slave trade thus:

> If you were to lose each year more than 200 million livres that you get from your (slave) colonies, if you had not the exclusive trade with your colonies to feed your manufacturers, to main ain your navy, to keep your agriculture going, to repay your imports, to provide for your luxury needs, to advantageously balance your trade with Europe and Asia, then I say it clearly, the Kingdom would be irretrievably lost.

The withering away of slavery

The aristocracy under whom slavery and slave trade flourished, and the slave merchants who reaped the profits had every reason to ensure their continuation. But under the armpit of their success emerged a new economic force, capitalism; and a new class which spearheaded it, the bourgeoisie. Soon the aristocracy became a serious impediment to the advancement of capitalism and the bourgeoisie. They interfered with the circulation of goods through all manner of restrictions, for example, taxes and regulations on weights and measures. Further, the aristocracy kept the population in the rural areas on

the land as serfs, and that way denied the industrialists the labour their factories needed. What is more, by controlling the land, the aristocracy were able to dictate the price of food and raw materials, and that way raise the industrialists' costs of production. This naturally ate into the bourgeoisie's profit margin.

As the bourgeoisie grew stronger, a political show-down with the aristocracy became inevitable. In the battles which ensued, the slave merchants sided with the aristocracy. It thus became necessary for the bourgeoisie to take on the merchants too. And since the slave merchants were among the most powerful, it became essential for the bourgeoisie to attack slavery and slave trade. This had two-pronged advantages: to weaken the economic power of the merchant classes, and to undermine the merchants' political support for the aristocracy.

In the United States the confrontation was between the slave owners and planters and the industrialists. The industrialists wanted the slaves to be "freed" so that they could enter into "free contracts" to work in factories.

In relation to Africa, the industrial and financial interests found that there was more to gain by leaving the African on the continent, instead of driving him into slavery across the Atlantic or elsewhere. The financiers and industrialists were interested in raw materials, markets for their products and spheres for investment. But slaves cannot constitute a market, since their labour is not paid for. Moreover, since they have to be fed, slaves tended to push up the costs of plantation production. So that the cost of sugar production, for example, would have to include the cost of the slave's upkeep and the planter's overheads. Whereas if the African was left "free" his upkeep would be his responsibility and he would employ "free" family labour to produce raw materials, while in addition constituting a market for the industrial commodities. The opening up of mines and factories in Africa made the "freedom from slavery" of the African even more imperative.

Needless to say, the abolition of slavery and slave trade was carried out behind complex issues and slogans, some of them supposedly lofty. But behind every complexity there is a simplicity. Slavery as an economic force simply run out of historical steam and had to give way to capitalism and colonialism.

The colonialism of Africa

And so it was that before Africa could recover from slavery and slave trade, colonialism was at its door. Africa's colonization was formalized between the European imperialist powers at the Berlin Conference of 1884. Colonization constituted the forcible annexation of African territory, the subjugation of independent African peoples to the political domination of the European powers for the purposes of economic domination and exploitation of African labour and natural resources.

At the turn of the last century when Africa was colonized, the continent was well organized in kingdoms, chiefdoms, etc., with clear political leadership and authority. The colonialists therefore could not impose their political

domination without first breaking the political power and authority of the African kings, chiefs and the people. Secondly, the colonialists did not want to impose political domination for its own sake: for them political domination was to pave the way for the economic domination and exploitation of African labour, to grow cash crops, work in mines or naked forced labour on colonial projects.

The African peoples, kings and chiefs could not voluntarily accept the imposition of colonial political or economic domination. Indeed they employed all available resources to resist. But the stakes were high for colonialism. They employed all available instruments of force and trickery, until they achieved their objective. The cost to Africa was high. Political leadership and authority were disrupted: the endogamous economies were destroyed: social and cultural institutions were disrupted: people's technology and knowledge were destroyed, etc.

Coming hot on the heels of slavery and slave trade, colonialism proved to be more devastating, leaving no stone unturned. This is how a Uganda nationalist newspaper put it in 1949:

> When Britain suppressed the existing slave trade, it seems she devised instead the plan of having slaves but bought them instead in their own native country ... The slave trade was abolished in one way and then introduced in another but the old slave trade was better because only a few (sic) were taken and those who remained home lived in peace, but the modern slave trade includes children and women...

In the Portuguese colonies the situation was so bad that not even the Inspector General of the Portuguese colonies could hide the reality. This is how he described the state of the colonized peoples:

> ... forced labour is in some ways worse than simple slavery. Under slavery after all the native is bought as an animal: his owner prefers his to remain as fit as a horse or so on ... but here (in Angola) the native is not bought, he is hired from the store, although he is called a free man. And his employer cares little. If he sickens or dies, his employer will simply ask for another.

Independence and neo-colonialism

Since the objective of political domination was primarily economic domination, colonialism imposed the capitalist relations of production. African technology and industry were destroyed so as to turn the continent into a market for European, American and later Japanese industry. This ensured that as long as the African economy was dominated by American, European and Japanese financiers, there would be no independent technological and industrial base. No strong capitalist class could emerge; there was no market for this to happen since Africa was the market for imperialism. Any capitalists who emerged were weak, without an independent life of their own, and therefore only able to survive under the shadow and protection of imperialism. The business fortunes

of this class of capitalists (compradores) is directly linked to the fortunes of imperialism, i.e., the continuation of political and economic domination of Africa.

But all this did not and could not stop Africa's struggle for independence and freedom. The real force which spearheaded the struggle for independence was a weak working class. The working class could not have been strong since it was based on a weak industrial base. It was not in the interests of colonialism to build a strong industrial base in Africa. In addition to the weak working class, there was an equally weak poor peasantry, dominated by a relatively small rich peasantry. Sandwiched between these two classes was an urban, intellectual middle class, usually dominated by the children of the local colonial agents and collaborators.

Needless to say, the different classes organized themselves to push for their interest. But since the workers' and poor peasants' interests are objectively hostile to foreign domination, the colonial masters persecuted them and ensured that no viable workers' or poor peasants' organization was established. On the other hand, political parties of the petty bourgeois middle class were given careful "encouragement" and "guidance" to such an extent that they were presented as national parties.

The reasons for the colonial support to the petty bourgeois political organizations are clear. The petty bourgeois grievance against colonialism was the discrimination which did not allow them to occupy the highly paid jobs in the colonial civil service as these were reserved for the Europeans. The petty bourgeois actually yearned for filling the places of the colonial governors and the other intermediary classes. A tiny intellectual group which emerged at the leadership of a colonially organized and infiltrated labour movement also shared the same ambitions.

It is this class which "demanded" and was "granted independence". Some measure of political autonomy was given to the intermediary classes, while the colonialists retained the real power, i.e., the control of the economy through neo-colonial/capitalist property relations - and that way the ultimate power to take political decisions. In essence, the colonial State as established by imperialism to oppress and exploit the African peoples remained intact at independence: the army, the police, the prisons, the judiciary, the civil service, the financial institutions, standing orders, etc. Quite often even the colonial personnel were also inherited. This was clearly possible because there was no principal contradiction between the heroes of independence and imperialism. Those who doubted the treachery of neo-colonialism quickly discovered truth to be stronger than fiction.

After presiding over one such neo-colonial State for more than 15 years, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, obviously writing from a position of knowledge, revealed the fraud of "independence" under imperialism:

> "The reality of neo-colonialism quickly becomes obvious to a new African government which tries to act on economic matters in the betterment of its own masses. For such a government immediately discovers that it inherited the power to make laws, to treat with foreign governments and so on but

did not inherit effective power over economic developments in its own country. Indeed it often discovers that there is no such thing as a national economy at all. Instead there exists in its land various economic activities which are directed at external needs, and which are run in the interest of external economic powers. Neo-colonialism is a very real and very severe limitation on national sovereignty. The total amount of credit and its distribution to the different sectors of the economy, for example, is determined by the banking system. The persons or groups who control the bank therefore have a very fundamental, almost deciding effect. The local agents of foreign banks may well be willing to co-operate with the national governments' priorities; but in the last resort their loyalty is and must be to their overseas employers. In case of dispute at top policy level, the government level will not be able to enforce its decisions ... In economic matters, therefore, our countries are effectively being governed by people who have marginal interest in our affairs if any, and even that only in so far as it affects their own well-being. That in fact is the meaning and practice of neo-colonialism. It operates under the cover of political colonialism while that continues. Its existence and meaning become more obvious after independence".

The African crisis

What today is popularly referred to as the "African crisis" is therefore in reality the result of the cumulative plunder and rape of the African continent first under slavery and slave trade, then colonialism, and now under neo-colonialism. The effects have been most telling. Between 1982 and 1986 for example, 200 million Africans in 24 countries suffered the effects of drought; 35 million were at risk of famine; 10 million were displaced and left their homes in search of food; 1 million died in Ethiopia; 4 million children died every year of malnutrition in the whole of Africa.

Less than 30 per cent of the African population has access to safe drinking water. 10-30 per cent of the children died before the age of five. Educational expenditure fell from $US 41 per capita in 1980 to $US 28 in 1985. Illiteracy is on the increase; industrial production has been on the decline, etc., etc. The only area where dramatic growth has been recorded is that of the debt. Africa's [illegible] now stands at over $US 200 billion.

The general economic situation has deteriorated so much that the economic well-being of all, except for a tiny section of the compradores, is threatened. The middle class who used to lead a reasonably stable and safe life are now faced with aggressive proletarianization. Labour has never been so cheap in Africa. In Uganda, for example, a senior university professor is paid the monthly salary of $US 10 itself inadequate for a day's living wage! Amidst all this, the World Bank and IMF are "satisfied" that Africa has a bright future, if only it continues to implement the policies and directives handed to them.

At this moment in the history of neo-colonial oppression, to achieve its objectives, imperialism has to dump and to pauperise even its class allies, the middle class intellectuals and businessmen. And if imperialism has reached a

stage where it has to be hostile to its class allies, what hope is there for the workers and poor peasants?

The political implications of neo-colonial oppression

The repressive and brutal nature of the neo-colonial economic domination is clear for all to see. What is equally clear is that this repression cannot be voluntarily accepted by the people. Just as they resisted slavery and slave trade and later colonialism, the African peoples are now locked in serious battles with neo-colonialism. As the neo-colonial nature of Africa's regimes unfolds they have more and more popular support to suppress the people and the only way to manage is through the use of force, trickery and deception. When the crunch hots up it is usually necessary for the army to come out on the streets, dismiss the civilian regime and promise to "stop a bad situation from getting worse". The result is that most of Africa's states are under one form of military rule or another. Where and when you have elections this is because they are an administrative device to [illegible] entrenched neo-colonial domination. The people therefore cannot wield power in a neo-colonial state; nor are they the source of the power of a neo-colonial regime. The real source of power lies with the international financiers like the IMF and World Bank. This is how P.B. Szbodere explains it:

> "By controlling the national economy . . . finance capital is able also to control the national worker and both these economic powers give finance capital a fantastic corruptive influence over national economic, social and cultural life. The huge commissions, discounts and profits paid to the local agents representing these foreign economic interests act as the economic basis for corrupting even the most "honest" and "national" of the native bourgeoisie and their representatives. The whole State bureaucracy which is used by foreign capital to issue them with import and export licences (for "ten per cent") is infected with this ..."

The benefits of neo-colonial domination to finance capital and the compradores explain why the threat (or actual use) of force, deception, trickery, manoeuvre, etc. have to be employed to keep it going. It should also explain why today African Governments are turning into a crisis the withdrawal of services and subsidies which had been the hallmark of good government: services and subsidies by which governments usually claimed legitimacy.

People's participation in the development process under conditions of oppression

Right from the time of slavery and colonialism and now neo-colonialism the African peoples have no doubt participated in the "development" process. The critical question to address really is "how involved in whose development"?

Under slavery and slave trade more than two million Africans participated, many of them to the point of death. But this participation did not benefit the African people: it benefited the European merchants, planters and monarchs - and to a tiny extent African slave middlemen. Under colonialism and neo-colonialism nobody is spared, all the African peoples have to participate. But again participation not for their benefit but for the benefit of finance capital. The African peoples participate in neo-colonial "development" under duress.

through the coercion of "market and other forces". It is the participation of victims.

However during the last 500 years the African peoples, in addition to participating in the expansion of development have maintained and developed their own technology, knowledge, philosophy, sciences, medicines, organizations, mobilized against colonialism, culminating in the "granting of independence". But in the last 30 years or so, flag independence has estranged itself. At the economic level, it cannot deliver the goods promised at independence. On the contrary, these "goods" have been withdrawn, are about to be withdrawn or have been seriously cut back. For example, free education, free medical service, road construction and maintenance, employment and living wages, agricultural inputs and cash-crop prices, etc. Economists of the anti-liberal class can assure us all is that tomorrow will be worse than today. People are getting poorer. In many countries the only growth area has been the army and security services so much so that here the government uses agricultural schools, there is now a police and army training college. Yet in many countries even such arms barracks cannot be maintained. The soldiers are expected to be "imaginative" in providing for their maintenance. In essence the neo-colonial state is in decay and its prime source is withering away.

Economically then, the African neo-colonial state with few exceptions lacks the material base to maintain itself as the national authority of the country it presides over or else is militarized to that extreme.

Politically the African neo-colonial State cannot stand on its own feet and therefore is incapable of providing social and economic and political leadership. This is precisely because the neo-colonial state, including the official trade unions, must necessarily ally and identify with the people in their struggle against foreign domination and therefore the struggle for democracy, national unity, national independence, peace, progress and international solidarity.

The people's response to the decay of the neo-colonial State

As the organs of the neo-colonial State, with its concomitant abdication of its responsibilities as directed by the IMF and the World Bank, have hit the people, the latter have had to respond by organizing themselves for survival, self-preservation, while figuring out long-term solutions. This explains the rapid growth of peasant and worker associations, cultural organizations, mutual aid societies, harambee groups and the indigenous African development organizations and NGOs.

Today when we talk about government it is as if this is an ancient institution against which everything must be defined, for example non-governmental organizations. But as a matter of fact government is a relatively new social institution. For historically man used to organize himself in small participatory units, with the decision-making process as close to those affected as NGOs would wish to dream today. This form of organization is deeply rooted in Africa, and passed the test of time such that when the African is faced with the most serious and deepest issues of joy or sadness, he turns to native wisdom, technology, medicine, or forms of organization. It is this that has

enabled him to survive the onslaughts of slavery and colonialism. And again it is to the traditional forms of social organization that the African peoples have turned in facing the neo-colonial rampage. This means therefore that there is a direct link between the forms of political, economic and social organization employed by the African peoples to survive slavery and neo-colonialism and the workers and peasants associations, voluntary development organizations, etc., which have been mushrooming in the last decade. It is here that new energies are to be found for the struggle for a self-reliant Africa. In my view, it is this fact which explains, at least in part, the close interest in people's and grass-roots organizations.

"Popular participation" in the context of present-day neo-colonial development thinking

Today the words "people's participation" and "popular participation" are on the lips of a diversity of people, with equally diverse, and sometimes conflicting interests. The United Nations system talks about "people's participation" and even the World Bank. As such therefore it is necessary to demystify these terms:

(a) Participation as interpretation

It should be pointed out that "participation" becomes an issue because certain sections of society, in our present-day world, the majority have been historically denied the right or possibility to participate in the affairs in which they have a legitimate stake. The denial to participate is possible because those who are excluded do not have the political power or the leverage necessary to win their rights. In the light of a continuing struggle on the part of the oppressed for general and specific rights, those in power tend to look at "participation" as a process for the gradual incorporation of the hitherto excluded sectors of society in some formal processes, for example "participation" in a general election. In such situations, the hitherto excluded participate on the basis of an agenda and issues determined by those in power. Participation in this respect helps to cloud the agenda of the excluded and to falsely make the exclusive agenda of those in power to be the agenda of society as a whole.

(b) Participation as a methodology

For some, participation is important in so far as it is conceived as a new methodology, a new technique to achieve old objectives. This view of participation is characteristic of those with the power and resources; for them participation is a means to efficiency and to improve the delivery of a pre-determined service. In this respect participation is typically project-specific, internal to the project and expires at the end of the life of the project. Important elements of this type of participation are "comments" and "device" - while the power to decide or control remain in the old hands.

(c) Participation as a means for social action

This type of participation usually involves a community which organizes itself to tackle community problems, for example, water supply, educational

facilities, health, etc. An organization is usually formed to facilitate such community action. For such participation, the hitherto excluded will analyze their social reality, identify the needs and problems, draw up a programme to address specific needs and problems, as well as mobilize the required resources, internally and externally.

Characteristic of this type of participation is community-focused and localized action, without the deliberate effort or vision to support neighbouring communities in similar initiatives, let alone a pan-African vision - for pan-African and global solidarity.

As can be seen, for people to participate on the basis of participation conceived as a basis for incorporation, or a methodology to improve efficiency, or as a means for limited projectist social action, is to participate on the basis of the oppressor's agenda and programme, and therefore to participate as victims.

Why is participation and issue?

In our view, participation has become an issue in the context of the search for an answer to man's biggest riddle. Today, man has at his disposal the material base, the technology and expertise to provide for all the basic human needs of every single person in the world, man, woman and child. Indeed as long ago as 1929 it was estimated that the machine power at that time represented the muscular power of 7 billion additional men - or the equivalent of five slaves for every single man, woman and child. But if this is so, why do millions starve to death or die the slow painful death of malnutrition? Why are millions unhoused? Why do millions of women and men who break their backs growing cotton go naked? Why do the people of Angola, with abundant fish resources, die for lack of protein?

In our view this is because of the internationalization of European, then American and lastly Japanese economic and political power which enable these powers to turn the peoples of the world, including workers in their own countries, into the slaves of finance capital. The redress of this situation, therefore means the breaking of the power of imperialism so that the science and technology available to us can be applied for the benefit of the people, instead of servicing the insatiable greed of finance capital. Moreover, international finance capital and the multinational corporation, in so far as they seek to centralize and concentrate, have become outmoded and backward in the face of advanced small-scale technologies, around which people can organize themselves in small participatory units, capable of responding to their needs. It calls for new forms of social organization, and that way banish the brutalities being committed against the environment, as well as see the back of bourgeois economies based on the facade of "scarcity".

Who is to lead the people's popular participation in Africa's Recovery and development?

The most reliable people who can work for Africa's recovery from the ravages of slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism, and usher our continent into

the age of development are the people who suffer most. These are the workers and poor peasants. This is so for two critical reasons. They are the creators of the wealth of African which has been siphoned off to the North for centuries. They are also the ones who can create new wealth under new conditions of independence and self-reliance. Secondly, as a class, the poorest and most oppressed are the only people who can prosecute the struggle for the liberation of their continent without reliance for privileges and exemptions. It is the workers and poor peasants who can flush out and prevent the grass roots imperialism by which neo missionaries under the guise of NGOs seek to do for our villages what we can or could do for ourselves better. It is the poor who can flush the World Bank and IMF Governors and Nyamparas from our "national" banks.

But this cannot come about by people participating in the oppressor's programme. As a matter of fact there is nothing "popular" about that; on the contrary, it is unpopular. The recovery and development of Africa can only be possible when people do not merely participate, but actually set the agenda for recovery and development. It is only then that participation becomes people's participation. It is also the only basis for Africa's recovery and development.

Who are the people:

In our view, "the people" are all those countries and sectors of society in all the countries of the world, whose general welfare and social progress are impeded by the present international undemocratic order as has evolved since slave trade, in which human technological capacity and capability are ahead, far ahead of social organization. They are the countries and sectors of society who are engaged in resisting struggle against hegemonism and imperialism or can be mobilized for such struggle. The corollary is equally true: all those whose social welfare and social progress are assured by the backward, undemocratic social organization and are hostile to a new international democratic order cannot be part of the people.

In Africa the people would include the workers, poor peasants, professional bodies, patriotic businessmen, progressive intellectuals, minorities and oppressed nationalities.

The way forward

The way forward for people to set the agenda for the recovery and development of Africa then, is to create an environment which is conducive to and supportive of people's initiatives to organize themselves around legitimate issues of concern. While organizing separately is inevitable and healthy, it is important for all people's organizations to have points of and mechanisms for contact and consultation, in other words it is important for each section of society to articulate their understanding of the crisis as well as chart a way out of it. Yet all the different views must have a point or points of convergence since a durable solution can only be possible through united action, based on a common vision. Dialogue therefore becomes critical in the struggles for a free Africa and a new international democratic order. However, true dialogue can only be possible if each of the contending forces, e.g., the workers, peasants, minorities, professional bodies, etc., develop a consciousness

and a consistent and coherent outlook and framework for reading the world. This is why the freedom of association is so important. Without it, imperialism will continue to impose its own theoretical and ideological framework for interpreting our history, as well as continue to impose 'solutions' to the very problems for which it is responsible.

In lieu of a conclusion

We are aware that many people will argue that the question of Africa's recovery and development is an urgent, practical issue, with us here and now, and that we cannot, therefore, afford the luxury of "historical excursions".

Unfortunately, while the problems may be urgent and with us here and now, they did not emerge only last night; they are the result of a long historical process. They cannot in fact be solved here and now. Just as the development of the African crisis has been a historical process which has taken shape and matured over generations and centuries, so it's resolution must of necessity also be a historical process. Indeed the understanding of the nature of the crisis and how it came about is itself a precondition for coming forward with a deep, durable solution.

On the other hand, those who accept the importance of historical analysis may nonetheless consider looking back 500 years as going a bit too far! Yet in historical terms 500 years is not a long time, in any case not for a vast continent like Africa. Although even if it was long, the real issue is not about the length, but rather the relevance of going as far as we choose to go.

Others might shout, "but we know all this!" It is our view that the critical issues herein articulated, while we believe are true, yet they are not commonly consciously or consistently articulated. Every opportunity must therefore be employed to popularize them. Further, even some of those who may claim to know, in practice do not build their arguments and analyses on the basis of what they claim to be common knowledge. It is like a scientist who claims to know all about the laws of gravity, but proceeds to construct an airplane whose design assumes that gravity does not exist. It cannot fly.

It is not enough to know. Knowledge needs to be of practical value. And in social science there is a gaping need: to build our arguments and analyses on the best of earlier studies and advancements - just as the modern scientists developing rockets, skylabs and all, build on Copernicus' discovery that the earth moves around the sun.

Most important, as Africans, we are not ashamed of our history as it actually was. Indeed our interests cannot be served by hiding or obscuring it. We also believe that it is permissible occasionally to be filled with democratic indignation.

REFERENCES

1. Tandon, Y., Militarism and Peace Education in Africa forthcoming

2. African NGOs Steering Committee, Africa Beyond the Crisis, 1987

3. Nabudere, D.W., Which Way Africa (mimeo)

4. Timberlake, L., Africa in Crisis, 1985

5. Rodney, W., How Europe Underdeveloped Africa

6. Leger, R., A Few Personal Reflections on the Relationships between Northern and Southern NGOs Pursuing Development Objectives (mimeo), 1989